Sophia Paulovna Eczardy.

By HENRY HARLAND.

CHAPTER I.

CURIOSITY.

In September, 1882, I came back to New York from a five years' residence as an art student in Paris, and took a studio with living rooms attached in St. Mark's place.

The house, which had formerly been a private dwelling, was owned and the three lower floors were occupied by an old Frenchman named Archimede Muselle. A large sign under the drawing room windows read as follows, in letters of gold upon a sable field:

ARCHIMEDE MUSELLE,
EXTERMINATOR OF INSECTS.

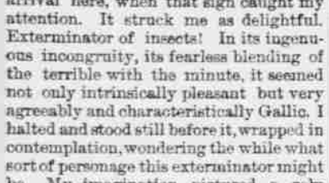
I chanced to be passing through St. Mark's place one day shortly after my arrival here, when that sign caught my attention. It struck me as delightful. Exterminator of insects! In its ingenuous incongruity, its fearless blending of the terrible with the minute, it seemed not only intrinsically pleasant but very agreeably and characteristically Gallic. I halted and stood still before it, wrapped in contemplation, wondering the while what sort of personage this exterminator might be. My imagination pictured a roly poly little fellow, French to his finger tips, with a glossy bald pate, a blandly benevolent countenance, an effusive manner and then a fierce defiant black mustache, waxed and curled upward at the ends—un Roland Furieux, mais bien petit, as Grinchette is described in the play. Anyhow, he would be, like his ensign, anticlimacteric; a droll mixture of ferocity and mildness, of the bellicose and the bourgeois; breathing simultaneously fire, vengeance and a gentle odor of soupe aux choux. I almost wished I had some insect to offer up for extermination, so that I might make an excuse for paying him a visit and scraping an acquaintance. In default of any I was at the point of moving off and continuing my journey when I happened to observe another and smaller sign, suspended below the big one, advertising a "Studio Apartment to Let."

A studio apartment! The very thing I was hunting for.

I climbed the steps, rang the bell and told the young man who opened to me that I should like to look at the studio apartment.

CHAPTER II.

THE EXTERMINATOR.



"Good morning, sair. You weesh to look at ze appartament?"

The young man—he was in his shirt-sleeves; he emitted an aroma that transported me in fancy to Marseilles, and he spoke like a Frenchman who had picked up his English on the Bowery—the young man said, "Walk into de awffus and set down; I go call de bosse."

"The boss?" I queried. "That is Mr. Muselle?"

"Sure," the young man responded.

The office into which he ushered me was a section partitioned off from what had of old time been the drawing room of the house. A large desk stood between the windows and behind it sat a snub nosed young lady with ruddy hair writing in a huge leather bound account book. I took possession of one of the half dozen chairs that were ranged in a row along the wall, and waited expectantly for the exterminator to materialize.

I did not have to wait very long, and then of course I saw that he corresponded in no particular with my preconception, being neither roly poly nor bland of countenance nor fiercely mustachioed. But I saw also and instantly that he was a vast improvement upon it. He looked precisely as though he had stepped out of a French vaudeville. Indeed, if an accurate portrait of him had been shown to me beforehand I could never have believed that it represented a real man in real life. I should have taken for granted that it was either a fancy sketch, or a caricature, or a bit from the theatre.

He was tall, spare, erect and manifestly very old. He had the face, and especially the hands, of a very old man. His hands were emaciated and discolored upon the backs with freckles and large yellowish blotches, as hands hardly ever are until old age comes on, and the skin hung loosely from the bones and the veins stood out dark and wiry, and the finger nails were parched and corrugated in a way that signified unmistakably advanced old age. His cheeks were sunken, his hollow eyes were framed in by a network of wrinkles; from each side of his jaw and beneath his sharp, prominent chin the mottled skin sagged downward and formed a dewlap over his Adam's apple. Yes, he was manifestly very old; at a charitable guess say 75. And yet by the employment of sundry ready enough devices he had contrived to turn himself into a most grotesque simulacrum of youthfulness. He wore a wig of abundant curling hair, in color that extraordinary reddish brown which one sees except in wigs. His cavernous old cheeks were painted carmine. His wrinkles were half filled up with powder. He was dressed in the latest and most youthful fashion, wearing a natty cutaway coat, a white linen waistcoat, a tower like standing collar, a modish blue cravat and trousers that had been carefully creased in a straight line down the front. To give his toilet the finishing touch he had loaded himself with as much jewelry as there was room for on his person. His scrawny fingers glittered with rings set with diamonds, rubies, emeralds and sapphires; his cuffs, pulled down well over his wrists, were fastened with buttons of amethyst; a massive golden watch chain, with dependencies of charms and lockets, stretched from pocket to pocket across his stomach, and a monstrous solitaire flashed from his cravat pin. To be sure, all this was very uncanny and repulsive in a way; but it was so extraordinary, too, that taken in connection with the gentleman's extraordinary calling it only intensified my previous curiosity about him. Beside, the gleam in his bleary old eye was not unamiable.

He marched briskly into the room, and after a brief glance at me and a polite bow began in rather a piping treble voice: "Good morning, sair. You weesh to look at ze appartament? Will you tek the trobble to walk opstairs?"

I don't know what I had expected him to say, but I was disappointed at what he did say; a perfectly matter of fact and business like inquiry, with nothing more than a foreign accent to lend it oddity. That seemed scarcely worthy of his get up.

But "Yes," I admitted, "I should like to look at the apartment."

And I followed him up two flights of stairs.

The apartment comprised the whole of the third story of the house. There was a good sized front room, 20 feet in depth by 25 in width, lighted by a large window facing north, and behind that a bedroom, a bathroom and a sitting room completed the suite. The front room or studio was well colored in neutral tints and the other rooms were pleasantly papered.

"What's the rent?" I asked.

"Eh, zat depend of 'ow you tek," the exterminator replied, with that cockney like contempt for aspirates which distinguishes his nation. "Eef you tek by the mawns, feefty dollars a mawns. Eef you tek by the year, five hundred for the year."

This, which would have been dear enough in Paris or in London, for New York was cheap. I had already looked at several studio apartments, but the only ones that were tolerably spacious and at the same time conveniently situated were simply exorbitant in price. St. Mark's place was accessible enough, and the quarter, if not fashionable, was picturesque; and my landlord would, I venturesomely surmised, prove to be rather a host in himself. So "Very well; I'll take the place for a year," I said.

"Aw right; that's aw right," he returned. "And for reference? You refair me to?"——

"Reference?" I repeated. I was not aware that in New York a would-be tenant, like a would-be housemaid, must establish a "character." Therefore, "Reference?" I repeated. "How do you mean?"

"Yes; sawmbody who knows you, to say if you are respectable and responsible," he explained, with unflinching candor.

"Why, do I look suspicious?" I demanded.

He scrutinized me carefully before he committed himself to an answer. Then, "No, sair; you do not. You look aw right," he vouchsafed, reassuringly. "But it is my custom, halways w'en I rent an appartament, to hask and geeve references. I geeve you twenty w'en we return downstairs."

"Oh, I see. It is the custom. Oh, very well. I refer you to my cousin, Mr. Eliot Morgan, of the firm of Morgan, Wynn & Co., bankers, down in Wall street. Is that sufficient?"

You see I rather fancied that the name of so eminent a financier as Eliot Morgan, pronounced by me with cousinly familiarity, would perhaps a little daunt my unconfiding friend. But I deceived myself.

"All right," was the exterminator's self possessed reply. "I go see Mr. Morgan to-morrow mawning, and if he say you are aw right the appartament is yours."

We went back to his office, and there he handed me a circular advertising his business as an exterminator of insects. "I undertake, by the particular job or on yearly contract, to exterminate all varieties of insects from your furniture, your clothing, your furs, your house. Moths a specialty. Also, for sale in pound, half pound and quarter pound packages, or in any quantity, Muselle's Magic Insecticide, positively guaranteed as the best insect powder in the universe. I refer by permission to the following well known citizens"— In number some thirty.

"Those ladies and gentlemen are of my clients," he informed me. "I refair you to henny or hall of them."

Just as I was leaving it occurred to me to ask: "Oh, by the bye, are there any other artists in the house?"

"There is a young lady hartist on the floor above you—the top floor. She is a female hartist, you understand. Her name is Mees— Wait; if I pronounce it you will not know how to spell it; if I spell it you will not know how it is pronounce. I write it for you."

He procured a pencil and a scrap of paper from his bookkeeper, and wrote in a stiff, old fashioned French hand, "Miss Sophie Paulovna Eczardy."

"You know hair?" he questioned.

"No; I don't know her. It is an odd name. How should it be pronounced?"

"Well, jus' for fon, you tell me how you think."

"Well, not as it's spelled, of course. Not Ecz-ardy?"

"Oh, nun-nun-no. Hit is a 'Ungarian name, and they pronounce it jus' like it was the letters Haich-ar-dee—Haichardy. Aia't that fonny?"

"Very. And who are they?"

"The young leddy and her faznir. 'E is one Doctor Eczardy. 'E is an eenvaleed. 'E die of cawnsomjtion, you onderstand. His name is Paul Eczardy, wiz anuzzer name in the middle which finishes in itch too long to remember."

"And his daughter is an artist? What does she paint?"

"Oh, anysing you weesh. She paint you a miniature on hivory. She mek you a beeg hoil painting. She tek you a leetel photograph, and draw you from it a picture in crayon any size you like. Hall kinds of hart."

"Ah, yes, I see. You pays your money, and you takes your choice!"

"Yes," assented the exterminator, gravely; "that is it exactly."

And whatever interest he had aroused in me concerning my future neighbor evaporated on the spot.

CHAPTER III.

THE NIHILIST.

A fortnight later found me established, with my household gods and painting tools around me, at Monsieur Muselle's, and on the best of terms with my landlord, who, by the way, had turned out to be a perfectly ordinary, good natured and simple minded French bourgeois, with no other noticeable idiosyncrasy than that childish vanity which impelled him to make a guy of himself in outward appearance, but which manifested itself in nothing else.

On the day when I took possession, and while I was busy unpacking and putting things in order, the old gentleman came to pay me a little visit.

"Well, it go aw right?" he began by inquiring.

"Yes, thank you; it seems to go pretty well," was my reply.

After which for a little neither of us spoke. I continued my labor. He stood still just within my threshold, and beamed upon me with a benign though rather vague and irrelevant smile.

By and by: "There is moch curiosity about you opstairs," he announced, making his tone and his physiognomy confidential, and pointing with a bejewelled finger to the ceiling.

"Indeed? What do they want to know?" I questioned.

"Well, she 'ave hask me, I guess, mebbe twenty-five questions, all about you. Your name, 'ow hold are you, 'ow you look, w'ere you come from, who is your family, w'at you pent—everysing."

"And you, what have you told her?"

"Eh, w'at do I know to tell? I tell her your name is Mr. Eliot, and you 'ave the air to be mebbe 26 years hold, good enough looking young feller for the rest, and you come from Paris, w'ere you 'ave made your stodies, and you got a brozer-in-law rich benker, whose name is Meestair Morguean. That is all I can tell her, because that is all I know."

"I'm sure I feel greatly flattered by her interest in me," I said.

"Yes, it is real nice," Muselle agreed. "The ole man, her fazair," he went on, after a moment's pause, "he is a fonny ole feller. 'E die of cawnsomption, you know."

"So you told me the other day. Do they think it's funny?"

"Ah, that is not w'at I have meant. I mean he is fonny in uzzair ways."

"Aha! For example?"

"Well, for example. Well, 'e is a—well, 'e is w'at you call in Eenglis liberal."

"Liberal, is he? Then he is rich?"

"Oh, no; you do not understand. I mean in the politic. 'E is liberal, radical, communist. In Rossia 'e 'ave been in prison five, six—I do' know 'ow many years—for a revolutionist."

"Really! A live Nihilist! But—but I thought you said he was Hungarian."

"The name Eczardy is 'Ungarian; yes, you right. Bot the ole feller, 'e is Rossian. His family 'ave reside in Rossia since two hawndred year. Jus' like mebbe you know Eenglis man named Beauchamp, or uzzair French name, yet 'e is Eenglis all the same. 'E is Rossian gentleman wiz 'Ungarian name, that's all. Well, as I tell you, 'e is a revolutionist; and he get found hout in a plot; and they arrest him and lock him op for five or six years in solitar' confinement, all alone, waiting till they try him, and zen they tek him before the magistrate, Gen. Ogaref, who decide he is guilty and condemn him to Siberia for life. Bot he escape from Siberia and come to this cawntry, w'ere 'e die. You see, he catch the cawnsomption w'ile he is lock op in prison five, six years. Two years already 'e has leeve here in my 'ouse, dying aw the time."

"He must be a remarkable man. Is he meetable? I should like to know him."

"If you 'ave come two, t'ree weeks before, yes, you can meet him. Bot since two, t'ree weeks 'e is moch worse than he 'ave been formerly, and 'e see no one excep' the doctor." After a little pause he added blithely, "He never be better again, I guess."

"It's rather sad for his daughter," I suggested.

"Yes, you right; hit is. She 'ave to work to gain their life, and at the same time she must be his norse. Yes, it is hard for her, no mistek. She get tired hout."

"Is her only means of livelihood her painting?"

"Yes, that's aw. She mek beeg crayon drawings for photographers, and she pent miniatures and hoil paintings. I get her to pent a miniature of myself on hivory. She pent beautiful, no use talking. W'at you think of this?"

He unbuttoned his coat and extracted from its inner pocket an oval case in red morocco. Opening it he submitted for my inspection the miniature in question.

"Eh, w'at you think of that?" he repeated.

I was surprised to find that it was an exceedingly clever piece of painting. Instead of the conventional product of the miniature maker that I had expected I beheld the handiwork of an able and painstaking artist. Well drawn, well modeled, well handled in respect of color, it presented the exterminator to the life. His wig, his powder, his rouge, his jewelry, his foppish costume, and behind them all, like a skull behind a mask, his genuine old age, were reflected as truthfully and as pitilessly as in a looking glass. It was justice untempered by mercy, and it was extremely good.

"Why, this is capital!" I exclaimed. "She has real talent. What a shame that she should waste herself on miniatures and working for photographers!"

"Yes, it is beau'iful; it is very fine," acquiesced Muselle, grinning complacently. "Bot if she work for photographers, you know, hit is because, as we say in France, il faut vivre, one must live. What would you 'ave? She mek no money if she don't."

"Yes, yes, I understand. But the woman who painted that has it in her to do things that would really be worth while. Does she never attempt anything better?"

"If you come down stairs wiz me," returned the exterminator, "I show you a beeg picture w'ich she pent, and w'ich I tek one time in place of the rent money they howed me. It is magnificent; it is superb. You come, yes?"

"Why, yes; by all means," said I.

And thinking in my soul that a landlord who would take paintings in lieu of rent money was a most convenient sort of landlord for painters to put up with, I followed him down stairs. He led me to the back room on the second story, which was furnished as a bedroom, and there, having closed the door and thrown open the blinds, "This is my 'ome," he announced; "and here is the picture."

He had described it as a big picture; and big it scarcely was. But in point of artistic merit it far surpassed what I had come prepared for, even though the specimen of her work which he had shown me above stairs had been so good. Its dimensions were perhaps two feet by eighteen inches, and it represented the interior of a dungeon or prison cell. An oblong window, too high up to be reached without a ladder, too narrow to permit the passage through it of a human body, and further protected by stout iron bars, admitted daylight and framed in a patch of sky—nothing else. For the rest there were bare stone walls, a stone ceiling and a stone floor; while a broad stone slab, so constructed that it formed a part of the solid masonry of the wall from which it projected, was the only piece of furniture in evidence, and manifestly answered at once for bed, stool and table. So much for the accessories. They were rendered in a spirit of exact, almost photographic realism; and the effect of massiveness, remoteness and gloom, proper to the subject, was vividly conveyed. And now the interest of the composition centered in the figure of an old man, seated upon the broad stone bench, with his elbows resting on his knees, his fingers buried in his long, white beard, and his eyes fixed intently, vacantly, painfully straight before him.

There was something so irresistibly pathetic in that old man's face and figure that I, who had come to criticise, felt myself instantly penetrated by an emotion of distress and sympathy as if I were looking upon a veritable human being and not upon a mere effigy in paint and canvas. His face was terribly emaciated; the cheekbones and the bridge of his nose seemed to be almost starting through the skin. His hair and beard were long and white and uncombed and untrimmed. His skin had that clayey, ghastly pallor which results from long seclusion from fresh air and sunshine. His clothes were old and worn and they hung baggily about his limbs as if he had shrunk up within them. His attitude, limp and bent over and huddled together, breathed a broken spirit in every line; and his eyes in their fixed, purposeless stare expressed the despair and the hopelessness and the deep dull pain that consumed his heart far more movingly than words ever could have done. In examining this picture you quite forgot to think of the artist's technique, which, however, was excellent. Indeed, if the drawing, coloring and modeling had not been very good no such final emotional effect could have been obtained.

"Well," demanded the exterminator, who stood at my elbow, "'ow you like it, eh?"

"Oh," I said, "it is very strong. Very powerful and imaginative and moving. But how did she come to choose such a painful subject? And who was her model? Where did she ever find such an awfully broken down old man?"

"Eh, for the sobjec' she pent w'at interest her, I suppose. The model, 'e was the ole man himself."

"What old man? Where did she find him? It's a wonderful face—like the wreck of a face that had once been strong, intellectual, almost beautiful."

"W'y, don't I tell you it was her ole man, her fazair; Dr. Eczardy, who leeve opstairs."

"What!" I gasped. "Her father? Her own father?"

"Yes. It represent him in the prison in Rossia, w'ere they keep him five, six years waiting to be tried, and w'ere 'e catch the cawnsumption. You see it was pretty hard staying all alone there, in solitar' confinement, one, two, t'ree, four, five, six years. Two years already 'e has leeve here in my 'ouse, dying aw the time."

"Hard! I should think it was. And you—I don't see how you can sleep with that picture in the room."

"Oh, you get use' to it," he explained, with a shrug.

"But she! However she could bring herself to paint it I can't understand. Her own father! The subject is horrible enough in itself. But when it comes to one's own father! To work over such a thing day after day, week after week! I don't see how she could do it. She—she must be a young woman of considerable grit."

"Yes, you right; she his," said Muselle. "She tole me about that picture, 'Mr. Muselle,' she tole me, 'I want to pent a picture w'ich mek people see 'ow in Rossia they treat a gentleman who is arrested only as suspect, and before 'e is tried to find if 'e is guilty or hinnocent. 'E is only suspect, waiting to be tried; yet for five years they keep him all alone there, in solitar' confinement like that till his 'ealth is destroyed, his career in the world ruined, his heart broken, his mind almost gone crazy and his family not kno 'ing if 'e is dead or alive, or in Rossia or in Siberia, or w'at, or w'ere, or anysing about him.' She tole me that, to explain w'y she pent him that way."

CHAPTER IV.

LISTENING.

One afternoon a week or so later while I was at work washing my brushes in my studio somebody began to sing in the room above. The voice was feminine, a deep and sweet contralto, and I took for granted that the singer must be Miss Eczardy. I listened with a good deal of interest, as well as a good deal of pleasure, for beside that the voice was in itself agreeable the song she sang seemed to me to be very curious as well as very pretty. Though the words, of course, were quite indistinguishable I guessed that it was a Russian song, perhaps a folk song. It had much of that savage impetuosity of rhythm and that almost barbaric brilliancy of color which we feel in some of the compositions of Rubinstein. It was swift, merry, jubilant even, in its movement; yet a prolonged minor wail seemed to run all through it, giving a secondary effect of sorrow. Here and there would occur a repetend, consisting of a succession of tense high notes; every new departure and variation of the tune always finished by bringing up at this same repetend; the influence of it upon the hearer was very strange. It sounded like hilarious laughter, yet at the same time it sounded like wild, passionate sobbing, and it moved the hearer at once to pain and to pleasure in a way that was very strange.

Gradually as I listened the rhythm appeared to become more regular, the eccentricity of the melody to moderate a little. "It begins," I thought, "to resemble something that I have heard before. What? Ah, I remember; it is a good deal like that song of Carmen's whereby poor Don Jose is made to lose his heart to her. There is the same effective use of the chromatic scale. She does it beautifully. I should immensely like to see her. I can fancy the way her eye flashes, the way her cheek flushes. She must be pretty. No woman could sing with so much fire and spirit unless she were pretty— Hello! what is this?" The floor over my head had begun to vibrate to the measure of a dance; the singer had begun to dance in time to her music. It struck me all at once that this was a little singular. Could Miss Eczardy not only sing but dance with her father ill unto death in the next—or, for all I knew, in the same—room? I was pondering this enigma in my mind when somebody rapped upon my door.

"Come in," I called.

The exterminator entered. He entered on tiptoe, as if fearful of making the least noise, and with his finger raised, his lips pursed and his brows knitted, as if to enjoin silence upon me as well. I looked up, puzzled, and waited for him to vouchsafe an explanation.

He advanced very close to me, when, bending forward, and protecting his mouth with the open palm of his hand, he demanded in a whisper: "Eh, you hear that?"

"Yes, I hear it," I confessed.

"Well, the ole feller—you know, the ole feller, her fazair?"

"Yes. Well? What about him?"

"Well, he feel better. Ca va mieux. You understand?"

"Ah, that's it, is it?" I exclaimed. "Dr. Eczardy feels better, and his daughter celebrates his improvement with a song and dance."

"Yes, that's it. She sing and dance for him, and that show he feel better. W'enever 'e feel pretty good halways 'e mek her to sing and dance. He like it."

"Well he may. She has a sweet voice and she sings with spirit."

"Yes, you right; she sing first class. Bot you hought to see her dance. She dance! Eh, I never seen anybody dance like her. It is magnificent. I go op stairs now to congratulate them, because 'e feel better, you understand. Then mebbe they hask me to walk inside and mek a visit. Then mebbe she go hon to dance, and I set there and see her. It is as good as a theatre. It is wors five dollars. Well, goo'-by."

And waving his bediamonded old claw at me he accomplished his exit. I felt as though I should not at all object to following him. I was beginning to be mightily interested in Miss Eczardy; and I am sure I should have surpassed the exterminator himself in appreciation of her dancing if I, too, had been permitted to witness it.

CHAPTER V.

GUESSING.

I dined that evening at a little Italian restaurant, around the corner from Monsieur Muselle's, in Second avenue, where very edible dinners were served for very reasonable prices. While I was discussing my macaroni there an incident befell which struck me as both interesting and suggestive. A young lady entered from the street carrying a basket—a small and rather pretty basket, woven of bright green and red straw. She was manifestly not a stranger in the place, for immediately upon her entrance one of the waiters stepped forward to meet her, and taking her basket from her he handed her a bill of fare. This document she studied for a minute, then spoke to the waiter as if giving him an order. He went off bearing her basket with him and during his absence she stood near the pay desk and chatted with the proprietor's wife, Mrs. Maraschini, who sat in state behind it. Presently the waiter came back and restored her basket to her, now manifestly heavier than when she had parted with it, and having settled her score and given the waiter his gratuity she returned into the street. This episode, I say, struck me as both interesting and suggestive. Interesting, because the young lady who sustained the chief role in it was very far from commonplace in her appearance. Of all known types of feminine beauty that which I personally admire the most is the Titianesque, the woman who is of large and generous mold, yet softly rounded, with a small head set upon a full and graceful neck, a white skin just transparent enough to be warm in the cheeks, and, to crown all, golden brown eyes and golden reddish hair. And of this type I had never seen a nobler specimen than this young person of whom for some three minutes I had been suffered to gaze my fill to-night in Maraschini's.

"If ever I am to fall in love," I said to myself, "it will be with a woman of that sort. That is the sort of woman I have always longed to paint—a figure tall and strong, yet rich and supple and womanly; skin like the flesh of a camellia, yet delicately touched with color of rose; hair like a mesh of flames, and eyes that can light up with laughter, melt with tenderness, or burn with passion, according to her mood. I have always longed to paint a woman of that sort, but models are so hard to find, so rare. A perfect model I have never seen until to-night. I wonder who she is."

And wondering who she was, I began to perceive the suggestiveness of the episode. It seemed to me to suggest that my fair unknown must have an invalid relative at home—a father, mother, brother, husband, unable to leave the house—to whom she was bringing the contents of her basket. And then all at once it flashed across my mind, "What if she should be Miss Eczardy! Miss Eczardy, come for her father's dinner!" I grant you that was an entirely unwarranted and far fetched conjecture; more especially so because this girl's style was essentially southern and Italian, and Miss Eczardy was a Russian; but it took possession of my fancy with the tenacity of a proved fact.

"Yes, I'll lay a wager that was Miss Eczardy come for her father's dinner. By Jove, if that magnificent creature lives under the same roof with me"—— Upon that hypothesis as a corner stone my imagination proceeded to rear a fair and radiant castle in the air.

I did not see the exterminator again until the next afternoon. Meanwhile the musical entertainment above stairs had been repeated, leaving me to infer that Dr. Eczardy's health was still on the mend. When next afternoon Muselle dropped in to see me, after we had exchanged the ordinary salutations, "And our invalid up stairs?" I began; "I hope he continues to feel better."

"Oh, yes; 'e feel pretty good. 'E 'ave his hups and his downs, you know, and jus' now 'e 'ave a hup. By and by 'e 'ave a down again, then mebbe another hup. But he never get well. 'E die before twelve mawns, I bet you feefty dollars."

"Do they keep house up stairs there, or do they go out to their meals, as I do?"

"Yes, she go hout. Not him. 'E can't. 'E too sick. 'E stay at 'ome w'ile she go hout and get his dinner in a basket. Then she come back, and they heat it together in their room."

"What sort of looking person is she?"

"Oh, she pretty good looking sort. She aw right about her looks."

"Yes, but her style? Is she dark or fair, large or small? Can't you describe her to me?"

"Well, she pretty beeg. Tall woman, you onderstand, and fine figure. Then for color—well, I suppose you call her fair; but she got red hair. She look like a Meridionale, if you know w'at that mean."

"A Meridionale? That's odd, considering she's a Russian."

"Yes, you right; it's hodd. Bot her mother she came from the south of France. She was a Frenchwoman. Miss Eczardy spik French as good as me."

From which conversation it appeared that my far fetched conjecture had not been altogether mistaken, after all.

CHAPTER VI.

FAINT HEART.

Well, there we sat, facing each other.

A fortnight slipped away. The health of Dr. Eczardy, as the exterminator kept me informed, continued to improve. Every afternoon his daughter sang and danced for his pleasuring. I conceived a hundred schemes by which an acquaintanceship between them and me might be brought to pass, but I lacked the executive ability to carry out any one of them. The simplest scheme of all, namely, to ask the exterminator to present me, was the least attractive. I really don't know why. In the end, however, I resorted to it.

"I told you a while ago that I should very much like to meet Dr. Eczardy. You said then that he was too ill to see people. But he is so much better now that don't you think?"——

"Well, I tell you w'at I do," my landlord returned. "I'll hask his daughtair. I'll request her permission to introduce you."

"Thank you; that will be very good of you," I said.

"I'll hask her this afternoon and let you know right away."

He left me, but at 5 o'clock or thereabouts in the afternoon he came again.

"See," he began, "she 'ave written her answer for you to read."

He handed me a visiting card. Upon its face was engraved "Miss Sophia Paulovna Eczardy." Upon its obverse, in pencil, was written: "Miss Eczardy thanks Mr. Eliot for his kindness in desiring to meet her father. But Dr. Eczardy is on the eve of leaving New York, and as he will need all his strength for the journey he is about to take Miss Eczardy fears that the excitement of making a new acquaintance might be bad for him. She regrets, therefore, that the visit so kindly proposed by Mr. Eliot must for the present be deferred." I vow to you that as I held this card in my hand and saw her writing on it and realized that she had written it for me—I vow to you that, cold and formal and disappointing as the message she had written was, my heart was pierced by a feeling so like the thrill of love that I can think of no other name to give it.

Next instant, however, "What!" I exclaimed, turning to the exterminator, "They are on the eve of leaving New York!"

"Oh, nun—nun—no," he quickly reassured me; "not they. Only him. 'E go to Bermuda to pass the winter. 'E start on Wednesday mawning. She only tole me today, or ehe I had tole you before."

"Oh, I see," I said relieved. "He goes alone. And she"——

"She will remain 'ere. She go hon living opstairs alone by herself. Her father leave her in my charge. I tek good care of her, don't you be afraid."

"I'm not afraid," I answered. "I think her father has left her in very trustworthy hands. But I should think it would be pretty hard for her to stay on here alone, with her father away ill, perhaps dying. It will be rather gloomy for her, won't it?"

"Eh, w'at will you 'ave? She must stay 'ere to do her work and gain their bread. The doctor 'ave ordered him to go w'ere it is warmer for the winter; and since she is not rich enough to go wiz him 'e must go alone, and she must remain alone behind."

"Yes, I understand," I said.

On Wednesday morning I heard a carriage rattle up to our door and stop there. Then, looking out of my window, I saw Miss Eczardy issue from the house, with her white haired old father leaning on her arm. I did not succeed in catching a glimpse of the old man's face; he back was toward me from first to last. All I saw was his feeble, tottering body, and his long white hair escaping from beneath his hat and falling down almost to his shoulders. The exterminator followed them, bearing the impedimenta of shawl straps, bags, etc. He got into the carriage with them, and the carriage drove away.

"Well, 'e's hoff at last," he told me that evening. "We had a fearful time down at the steamer, she felt so bad. She cried and cried, and would not be comforted. Bot at last the steamer sailed and 'e was hoff. Coming back in the carriage she cried hall the way. She tole me, 'Mr. Muselle,' she tole me, 'I am sure I never will see my fazair alive again.' I tole her I bet her feefty dollars 'e come back aw right. Bot between you and me I shouldn't wondair eef 'e die down there. 'E's a fearful sick man, no mistek."

On Saturday evening I went to get my dinner at Maraschini's, that little Italian ordinary in Second avenue of which mention has been made before. I found the place crowded to overflowing, as it was pretty apt to be on Saturday evening; and having looked around in vain for an unoccupied table I was on the point of going away to seek refreshment elsewhere when the enterprising wife of the proprietor, observing my predicament and reluctant to lose my reckoning, came up and exhorted me to remain. "No please!" she queried. "Oh, that's all right. I make a place for you."

She led me into a small back room, properly a sort of auto-chamber to the kitchen, which served as armory of the stronghold, its walls being lined with dressers containing pots and pans, spits and skewers and such other weapons, offensive and defensive, as are required to complete the accoutrement of a bolted cook, but which, on occasions like the present, was thrown open to the enlightened and there she kept her promise to make a place for me by ordering a chair to be brought and planting it at one side of a tiny table, the opposite side of which was already in commission.

"Set there," she bade me. "You'll be all right."

I obediently seated myself there; but I did so with a beating heart, for the occupant of the other side of the table was Miss Eczardy.

Well, there we sat, facing each other across that tiny table throughout that long Italian table d'hote, and ate our respective dinners in solemn, unbroken silence. I wanted desperately to begin a conversation with her, but I lacked the hardihood to speak the first word, and of course I could not expect the first word to come from her. I thought out a dozen possible maneuvers by which the ice might be broken and the conversation started; but when it came to the rub of putting any one of them in operation my heart failed me, my tongue clove to the roof of my mouth. I fancied I had got my courage quite screwed up to the point of asking her to pass the vinegar; that, it seemed to me, would be a natural opening and one that might lead to something; but then at the eleventh hour it occurred to me that the vinegar cruet stood within easy reach of my own hand, and that it would be infinitely ridiculous to impose upon her the supererogatory task of passing it, and so I dared not. This was utterly absurd.

There was no reason why we should not chat together. She knew who I was. I knew who she was; we were members of the same guild, dwellers under the same roof tree; we had even corresponded together—did I not hold in my possession one of her visiting cards, with a note written on it by her hand for my eyes? There could have been no earthly harm or wrong in our speaking to each other and making friends. It would have been unconventional, if you like, but not unconventional in any bad sense; and beside, isn't unconventionality in their mutual intercourse the privilege of artists? Yet there we sat vis-a-vis, distant not more than eighteen inches from each other, and my childish timidity tied my tongue and prevented my making the first advance.

As time went on and I saw the moment drawing near and nearer when she would have finished her dinner and be ready to leave the restaurant my anxiety to speak to her waxed more intense, but not so my courage. I wondered whether she appreciated the situation as I did and perceived my faint heartedness, and was laughing at me in her sleeve. I stole a glance at her beautiful white face; it was inscrutable. Presently she rose from her chair, put on her mantle and moved off into the other room, into the street.

The chance was gone. It was too late now. Such a chance might never occur again. I reviled myself with curses not loud but deep.

CHAPTER VII.

ABSENCE.

White and beautiful and still, lay Sophia Paulovna Eczardy, dead.

On Monday morning the post brought me a letter. It was a letter that I had been expecting for a good while, and, other things equal, it ought to have caused me the liveliest pleasure. It was a letter from Mr. Archibald Winthrop, a wealthy citizen of Boston, inviting me to come and stay at his house and paint the portraits of his wife and his two unmarried daughters. It ought to have afforded me the liveliest possible satisfaction, for it meant a good lot of money, and it meant also, what was more important, the first serious step in my career. Yet, as a matter of fact, it afforded me no satisfaction whatever, but only vexation and regret. Of course I could not think of saying no to it; that would be to fly in the face of Providence. But if I said yes to it I should have to leave New York and remain away for a couple of months at the shortest; and for reasons which the reader will divine I was loth to leave New York even for a seven-night.

However, like a true American—the issue lying between business on the one hand and sentiment on the other—I cast the choice in favor of business, and two days later found me aboard the afternoon express train bound for Boston. The exterminator and I had had an affectionate parting, and I had exacted from him a promise that he would write to me and let me know "how things went on." I did not mention Miss Eczardy's name to him, but I felt sure that when he wrote to me his letter would contain news of her.

Of my sojourn in Boston, which lasted on till after New Year's, I will only say two words—it taught me the truth of the adage about absence making the heart grow fonder. I thought so much of Miss Eczardy, her beautiful pale face was so often visible before my imagination; I so passionately regretted the wasted opportunity I had had to make her acquaintance; I so eagerly looked forward to my return to New York, when I might have another opportunity, I hoped and believed, that by and by I began to realize what seemed very strange, that I was not simply interested in her, but that I was in love with her. Yes, that I was in love, head over ears in love with a young woman between whom and myself never a word had been exchanged and who, doubtless, was scarcely more than half conscious of my existence.

Meanwhile, I waited anxiously for the letter Muselle had promised to write me. But days grew into weeks, and weeks were lengthening into months and no letter came. This made me very restive and unhappy. I tried to comfort myself by repeating the old commonplace that no news is good news, but I discovered that